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Rationalities in trade union work – a discourse analytic perspective on the strategies of three Danish trade unions for professionals

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Abstract

The ambition of this paper is to analyze the discursive practices of three Danish trade unions for professional and managerial staff (The Danish Society of Engineers, The Association of Lawyers and Economists, and The Danish Association of Masters and PhD's) as found in their strategy and position papers. Using discourse analytic methods the paper will analyze, discuss and compare the current strategy papers of the three unions in order to investigate how they *problematize* their roles and objectives. This investigation will clarify the discursive premises of the unions and it will be shown how these premises restrain and afford their agendas. Thus the overall purpose of the paper is to investigate and describe the dominant logics and rationalities that have shaped the documents and to point to their limits and bounds. This archaeological investigation will be the point of departure for a critical examination of the implicit and tacit naturalizations made in the documents that reveal the ideological presuppositions of the discursive practices of the authors.

Besides documenting how 'strategic management' has become an integral part of Danish trade unions practices, the paper sets out to discuss this trend in relation to the general neo-liberal decentering of the 'social' and promotion of 'community' as the locus of governance. Through examples from the practices of the Danish trade unions, the paper will substantiate how new technologies of governance and the subjectification of union members as 'customers' tend to transform the role of the trade unions from the position of 'political actors' to 'service providers' in the advanced liberal societies.

In closing, the paper will gesture to possible contestations, points of resistance and alternative discourses that are silenced in the strategy documents of the unions. By highlighting these vantage points the paper will thus suggest potential avenues for reorientation of the strategic practices of the unions. The critical potential of the paper will aim to readdress issues and fundamental questions about solidarity, identity, inclusion and exclusion, the territoriality of the unions, political ambitions, etc. By destabilizing the predominant neo-liberal discourses of the trade unions, the paper thus aims to point to alternative discursive resources and practices for strategy development.

Introduction

The trade unions are in a state of crisis and the members want change. It is mandatory that the trade unions adjust their practices in order not to fall into decay caused by member flight, lack of member involvement and failure to affect the political agendas in society. Basically, this is the state of mind that holds sway in contemporary trade union debates in Denmark and probably in most western countries. The trade unions thus recognize that they need to substantiate and explicate their activities in order to retain and recruit members and legitimize their position and status in society. On this background most modern trade unions are engaged in processes of strategy development that rationalize their endeavors and set goals for future activities. Although the Danish academic trade unions are not confronted with the same problems of member flight as the traditional blue collar unions, a growing recognition of ‘strategic awareness’ has become manifest through the last decades.

In this paper we wish to investigate the discursive practices of three academic trade unions in Denmark – The Danish Society of Engineers (IDA), The Danish Association of Lawyers and Economists (DJØF) and The Danish Association of Masters and PhD’s (DM) – as found in their strategy and position papers. The overall objective of the paper is thus to analyze the strategy and position papers of the three trade unions in order to investigate the problematizations (Foucault 1984) by which the policies, visions and goals of the unions manifest themselves as what can and ought to be considered about their practices. The purpose of this paper is not to evaluate the strategies or to make judgments about the proposed objectives of the strategies. Neither are we looking for objective, causal explanations for the success or failure of the strategies of the unions. The objective of the paper is to investigate and describe the dominant logics and rationalities that have shaped the strategies and point to their limits and bounds. In this archaeological endeavor we wish to position a critical voice that can point to the implicit and often tacit presuppositions and granted assumptions of the strategies. The exposure of the dominant rationalities in the strategies will potentially contribute to a disclosure and destabilization of the discursive practices. The analysis thus bears the putative promise of establishing resources that can transform the strategic work of the unions, or at least point to the obstacles for developing alternative avenues.

The argument of the paper will be put in four consequent sections. In the first section we will develop the theoretical and methodological perspective of the paper and thus position ourselves as researchers and trade union activists. We will identify and delimit our perspective within a discourse analytic tradition in order to stress the perspectival and partial character of our research. Furthermore a brief description of the context of the research production will be established. In the following section we will analyze the strategies of the three unions in order to describe their discursive positions and explicate the rationalities and technologies by which the strategies are informed and oriented. In the third section we will try to reflect our analysis in relation to the wider societal development. The ambition of the discourse analytic perspective is to describe *how* the strategies are produced. It is not an ambition to explain *why* the strategies are produced in specific ways given specific historic and societal conditions. We will, however, discuss the strategies in relation to a societal diagnosis of the development of ‘advanced liberal societies’ (Miller & Rose 2008) in order to situate them within broader discursive frameworks. In the fourth and final section we will reflect on our research and its potential for (re)introducing silenced agendas about solidarity, identity, inclusion/exclusion, political ambitions and activism in trade unions strategies.

Research perspectives

One of the authors of this paper has worked as an executive officer in academic trade unions for the last two decades. He has been involved with the development of the unions’ policies and strategies and is presently engaged in advising a process of setting new visions for the development of The Danish Society of Engineers. Thus he has been – and still is – an actor in the strategic work of the academic trade unions. On the one hand his position as a trade union officer gives us privileged first hand access and valuable background information about the unions’ strategy work, but on the other hand, it can prove to be problematic according to traditional scientific standards of impartiality, detachment, neutrality and objectivity on behalf of the researcher. Whether his position ends up affording or compromising our research very much depends on the ambitions of our research and on the theoretical and methodological approach that we employ. It is thus necessary to be explicit about our approach and to position our perspectives within a theoretical and methodological framework in order to give transparency to our research.

Our theoretical and methodological approach is inspired by social constructionism, post-structuralism and post-marxism. It draws on resources in Critical Management Studies (e.g.

Alvesson et al. 2009), Governmentality Studies (e.g. Dean 2010, Miller & Rose 2008) and Science and Technology Studies (e.g. Hackett et al. 2008, Langenhove & Harré 1999) and the discourse analytic tradition of Foucault. These research traditions do not aspire to be homogeneous and well defined in themselves or reciprocally, but they are united in their anti-essentialist ontology that recognizes the historical, social and contingent character of human action. These traditions stress the situated position of the actors within material and discursive frameworks and formations. This means that the actors have no pre-discursive access to ‘reality’ or ‘the other’ – experience will always be mediated by language, our collective classifications, conceptualizations, discursive practices, etc.

Neither do the traditions share one common ‘method’, but they do have a ‘family resemblance’ in their choice of situated, contextual and historic research methods of material-discursive formations. Likewise the traditions are skeptical in relation to causal, totalizing and global models of explanation. Furthermore the traditions all reject positivist criteria of validation in research. Instead the research process is viewed as an interpretative production of theoretical/empirical material that is not liable to the transcendental positivist criteria of ‘facts’, ‘objectivity’ and ‘truth’. Instead the criteria of quality and validity of research should be judged according to the working standards of the research community, i.e. relevance, methodological rigidity and transparency, analytical consistency, theoretical and empirical reflection, etc. In consequence it is the community of social scientists that acts as the ultimate tribunal of validation in the social sciences.

Thus, our ambition is not to give an impartial, neutral, representative or objective account of the strategy development. Neither do we see our account as a subjective plea. Our ambition is to give a rigid, structured and text-oriented account that will illuminate the distinct problematizations and hegemonic projects of the strategies. Thus, the ambition is explorative and critical (Foucault 1988). Our explicit focus on the strategy documents and position papers will delimit and define our research object, and our analysis will draw on a corpus of theories, methods and concepts rooted in the social sciences with established standards and criteria. This will not establish our analysis as ‘impartial’ or ‘neutral’, but it will, however, make the analytical preconditions and analytical grips explicit. By employing a discourse analytic perspective on the empirical material we wish to suspend our normativity and establish a consistent framework for the description, interpretation and discussion of the strategies (Smith 1995, 27-28). The discourse analytic perspective enables us to

distance ourselves from the empirical material and thus distance our analysis from our positions as actors within the field of trade union work (Dean 2010, 56).

Our analysis will view the three strategy documents as textual realizations of horizons of discursive practices. Thus, our analysis will not consider whether the documents actually represent the ‘real’ practices of the unions. On the contrary, our analysis will interpret the strategies as ‘acts of confession’ or ‘purified declarations of intent’ (Koselleck) with performative agency. It is obvious that our discourse analytic perspective will be inspired by the work of Foucault. However, this paper does not leave room for a systematic genealogical investigation. Instead we will limit our exposition to an archaeological reading of the texts that – on an eclectic basis – draws on the above-mentioned academic traditions.¹ Choosing an archaeological perspective in preference to a genealogical perspective means that our analysis will only deal with the actual manifestations and patterns of the strategies and not take their historical constitution into account. Thus, our ambition is not to investigate the genesis of the strategies or their processes of transformation. The strategies will be read as regimes’ ‘actions on action’ in order to transform practice. The strategies of the academic unions will be seen as instruments of governance in relation to other partners and the unions themselves (Knights & Morgan 1991).

Background

Before we set out to analyze the strategy documents and position papers of the three Danish trade unions we will briefly contextualize the texts by giving some background information about the unions and the Danish labor market structure in relation to unionizing. There is a long and strong tradition of unionizing in Denmark (e.g. Galenson 1998) – also among white collar workers and professionals. Thus, the general density of unionization in Denmark is over 70 percent and the absolute number of unionized professionals is increasing, as a growing number in the labor force has a professional background. In Denmark, unionization of professionals is organized in accordance to the professionals’ educational background. In order to become a member of IDA, DJØF or DM you have to hold an academic degree on a bachelor, master or doctoral level in respectively engineering/the natural sciences (IDA), the social sciences, law and management (DJØF) or the humanities or natural sciences (DM). The trade unions of the professionals have a combined focus. Besides supporting their members in processes of collective bargaining and the enforcement of employment contracts, the unions also – to varying degrees – fulfill the role of

professional societies. Thus the Danish unions for professionals are balancing between traditional union activities and activities that focus on professional affairs. IDA, DJØF and DM are by far the largest and most influential professional trade unions in Denmark, but there are approximately 20 other unions for professionals (e.g. for veterinarians, architects, dentists). The employment conditions for the members of the three unions differ in various respects. Approximately 90 percent of the members of IDA are employed in the private sector. In DJØF the members are distributed on a fifty-fifty basis between the private and the public sector, while approximately 75 percent of the members of DM are employed in the public sector (primarily in the educational and research sector). Until 2009 all three unions were members of the Danish Confederation of Professional Organizations that is one of the three central confederations of unions in Denmark (the two other are respectively for unskilled/skilled workers and professionals without a university degree). In 2009 IDA chose to leave the confederation and take the role of an independent trade union. However, there are still close relations between IDA and the other professional unions on a more informal level. A so-called “market agreement” established by the professional unions has regulated the membership recruitment amongst university graduates until recently, but the proliferation of new university degrees with mixed curricula has made it difficult to draw clear-cut boundaries between the domains of the unions. In consequence the agreement was dropped and now it is up to each union to define their criteria for admission. As will be made clear in the following analysis of the unions’ strategies, this development has increased the competition, profiling and marketing efforts of the unions. Another central tenet of the analysis concerns the general development of the professional labor market. In general the proportion of professionals at the Danish labor market is increasing and still more professionals find jobs in the private sector. There is, however, no tradition for collective bargaining for professionals in the private sector in Denmark. In sum, these developments have contributed to destabilize the traditional union practices of the three trade unions: the predominance of collective bargaining in the union practices is contested as still more professionals have individual contracts with their employers, and the demarcation of the trade unions’ territories according to the members’ educational background is blurred by reforms in the educational sector. In consequence, the trade unions have become reflexive about their practices, missions and services. Union practices are problematized and the unions engage in a constant process of reflection about their *raison d’être*. This development has given priority to the fabrication of position papers and strategies that in explicit terms discuss and state the visions, missions and goals of the trade unions. The governing bodies and committees of the trade unions thus use

considerable amounts of time and resources – assisted by their professional secretariats of political advisors and administrative officials – in writing up strategy documents.ⁱⁱ The following analysis will examine the essential strategy documents of the three professional unions.

Analysis

By focusing on the strategy development of the professional trade unions, we wish to analyze how the unions express their ambitions of governance in relation to their internal affairs and in relation to others, and – more specifically – how strategies can be considered to act on actions. Both IDA, DJØF and DM have drafted up visions, plans of actions, position papers, etc. that develop the goals, ambitions and activities of the unions in explicit terms (IDA 2005a, IDA 2005b, DJØF 2010, DJØF 2008, DM 2008, DM 2009)ⁱⁱⁱ. The documents typically describe the general visions of the unions, but sometimes they also draw up the targets and objectives of the unions on a more concrete basis. The concern of our analysis is with the unions' statements of tasks, challenges, opportunities, etc., and how this problematization installs specific rationalities and techniques of governance for the practices of the unions (Miller & Rose 2008). In our interpretation of the text we will search for central priorities in relation to the exposition of the texts, themes, storylines, structures of arguments, rhetorical genres, and positionings of the unions (Langenhove & Harré 1999). On this basis we will discuss the strategies in order to elucidate the rationalities and logics of their construction.

IDA

The vision memorandum of IDA (IDA 2005a) is a brief five page note drawn up in bullets. The visions and objectives for IDA are phrased by the use of slogans and watchwords. The memorandum states that: *“By 2011 IDA should be the leading professional body for university graduates”*. This implies, among other things, that IDA should be:

“the most competitive professional body on the market, based on an overall consideration of quality, effectiveness, and level of costs.”

Thus, IDA defines itself as a professional body and a union for university graduates with a background within technology and the natural sciences. However, the language used to describe IDA's vision indicates a commercial framing of the union's objectives that stress competition with

other unions. The parameters for competition are thus stipulated to be quality, effectiveness and the level of costs.

What is to be considered as ‘quality’ is not explained in detail in the text, except that:

“IDA should develop a broad and adequate supply of membership services that members can utilize if they are in-between jobs, when negotiating salaries, or in unfortunate situations of unemployment.”

‘Quality’ is thus related to membership services provided by the secretariat of the union. But ‘quality’ is also indirectly specified in the additional stipulation that IDA should strive to become *“the preferred forum in Denmark in relation to all technical and technological issues”*. In this last conception the trope of ‘competitiveness’ is used again to add value to the union membership, but this time in relation to the members’ professional standing. Thus the construction of the concept of ‘quality’ is both related to a discourse where the union member is perceived as a customer, and a discourse where ‘quality’ is related to the union’s yielding capacity to supply professional services. The text states that the members’ loyalties to IDA should be measured in terms of *“the members’ indicated satisfaction with the utility value of their membership”*.

The text is much more explicit in relation to the parameters of effectiveness and level of costs.

‘Effectiveness’ is determined by propositions that address ‘promptness’, ‘goal-directedness’, ‘focus’, ‘priority’, ‘synergy’, ‘optimization of procedures’, ‘advantages of large-scale operations’ and closely related to ‘cost-consciousness’ in relation to spending the union’s money. Furthermore the text addresses the maintenance of members’ loyalties by means of *“segmentalized and focused offerings”* in the form of economic membership advantages *“that will offer the member an average minimum of 75 percent cost reduction on their membership fees”*. ‘Costs’ are related to the level of the membership fees and the text states that *“all categories of fees should be reduced by 20 percent by 2011”*.

In relation to the ambition that IDA should become the leading professional body in Denmark, the vision also expresses aspirations about membership growth:

“The number of members engaged in active employment should be increased from 42,000 members to 60,000 members, and the number of student memberships should be increased from 6,000 to 8,000”.

Increasing membership numbers are viewed not only as a means to obtain large-scale operations and effectiveness but also as an independent success criterion of the strategy. Explicit reasons for having increasing membership numbers are not stated as an objective, but the text state that:

“the procurement of new graduates from different educational institutions should reach 90 percent of a year group”.

DJØF

DJØF’s position paper is a 12 page long document. It is composed in an argumentative prose style that elaborates and substantiates the goals, challenges and actions of the union. The position paper states that DJØF has three objectives:

“to become the best professional union in Denmark to provide opportunities for development and security for its members; to increase the number of members to 80,000 by the end of 2012 and to 100,000 by the end of 2015; to increase membership satisfaction in the first three years by 10 percent.”

The position paper deals with the objectives in two general sections. ‘Membership service’ provides the overarching framework for the discussion of the objectives in the position paper: individual and collective support to the members in relation to negotiating salaries and working conditions; career guidance and counseling in relation to professional development; lobbyism for the profession; employment initiatives; concrete (economic) advantages (e.g. discounts on consumer products and wholesales initiatives); membership communication; and growth and recruitment. The other section of the position paper discusses the objectives under the heading: ‘Resources and systems’. It deals with human resource issues in the union’s secretariat and the union’s ICT facilities. ‘Membership services’ are thus constructed as a broad and inclusive category covering both the direct and individual membership service and the mediated (political) lobbyism on behalf of the interests of the profession.

The objectives in relation to ‘direct membership service’ are construed as ‘accessibility – without considerable delays’, ‘immediate solutions to members’ queries’ and ‘professionalism’ that can generate a sense of security for the members. The paper explains how DJØF should provide an ‘excellent service’ *“that cannot easily be copied and that gives DJØF a competitive advantage”*. According to DJØF’s position paper *“the purpose of increasing membership satisfaction is to develop loyalty and thereby retain the members.”* The mediated provision of ‘membership services’ will create ‘long-term value’ for the members. It involves:

“political lobbying that will create new agendas for relevant issues. By setting new agendas we [i.e. DJØF] can bring attention to our stance and create results that will benefit our members.”

The agendas concern *“the development of industrial policies that can be of the utmost importance for members’ opportunities to find employment”*; *“to influence the priorities for developing healthy working conditions”*; *“equal opportunities”* and *“social responsibility”* (in specific relation to *‘the protection of law’*, *‘freedom of speech’* and *‘the division of administrative and political governance’*). The lobbying of DJØF should be based on a foundation of ‘solid knowledge’ and ‘trustworthiness’. The position paper delimits the range of DJØF’s core objectives by specifying that concrete economic advantages are not to be considered as an essential service. They only serve to *“attract and retain members – especially students”*.

In general the position paper considers ‘membership service’ as a means to increase membership satisfaction and retain members in the union. The concept of ‘membership service’ is thus seen as a vehicle to increase membership numbers.

DM

The position paper of DM is a 10 page document that states the standpoints and proposed activities of the union in bullets. The field of responsibilities and actions is described on a general level stressing the political ambitions and principles. However, DM has worked out an additional and supplementary memorandum that describes the union’s current activities and planned initiatives in details. The memorandum is a 23 page document drawn up in prose that:

“states the prioritized actions of DM in the coming year. It describes the core services, political objectives and the special activities of DM’s special interest groups.”

The overall ambition of the memorandum is thus to:

“set up concrete objectives for DM’s efforts that can be used as criteria of success for the evaluation of the initiatives.”

The memorandum lists two general prioritized initiatives: ‘equal opportunities’ and ‘opportunities for employees to have a say on their working conditions’. In relation to ‘equal opportunities’ DM wants to become *“the best salary negotiating union for professionals that enforces equal opportunities”*; to guarantee women leverage in society; and enlighten the public about the need for men to use opportunities for paternity leave. In order to increase employees’ say on their working conditions DM will create results:

“enforced by law, cooperation accords and collective bargaining and by raising the awareness of rights and opportunities in relation to changing workplace culture and behavior.”

In addition to these generally prioritized objectives the memorandum goes into details in order to set up objectives for the union’s local interest groups, e.g. in the private sector, managers, and the self-employed. Here the specified activities range from the education of shop-stewards to the development of welfare policies. In relation to the development of welfare policies the memorandum explains:

“A committee has been appointed to develop welfare policies. Among other things the committee investigates the discursive shifts in relation to welfare models. It is the opinion of DM’s board that the [Danish] liberal-conservative government has banished the general philosophy about equal rights for every citizen in the welfare society and left groups to be marginalized by reducing their unemployment compensation rates. This has paved the way to break with the general principles of the welfare society and the flexicurity model.”

In closing, the memorandum describes other activities such as career guidance and continuing education that is part of the union's services. The purpose of these activities is:

“to update and improve the qualifications and capacities in order for the members to stay employable on the market.”

The rationale of supplying economic advantages to the members is that *“economic advantages should underpin DM's profile and contribute to the recruitment and retention of members”*.

Finally the memorandum discusses DM's communication and news services. Here it is stated that the objective of DM's member magazine is to *“expose DM as an engaged union [...and] a result-oriented partner”*.

Discursive positioning

By using different nouns and pronouns in the descriptions of their status, the three professional unions position themselves differently. DM is consistently using the word 'fagforening' (i.e. trade union) in their self-representation, while DJØF is using the more ambiguous Danish word 'faglig forening', i.e. a word that both connotes a classic trade union and a strictly professional society). IDA, on the other hand, makes use of the expression 'faglig interesseorganisation', that can be translated as a professional body, but carries strong connotations to a pressure group while having much weaker connotations to unionism. By using this self-presentation IDA sends signals about the purpose of the union. It is much more about taking care of the members' self-interests than engaging in broader union endeavors. It is obvious that both DJØF and IDA enroll themselves in a competitive discourse when they express their ambitions about becoming respectively: *“the best professional union ('faglige forening') in Denmark”* and *“the leading professional body ('faglig interesseorganisation) in Denmark”*. By characterizing their ambitions in the terms of the competitive and growth-oriented market discourse, they substantiate their image and identity in a distinct way. DJØF and IDA are thus explicit in their self-positioning, whereas DM positions itself indirectly through stating the unions' political stances, ambitions and objectives (Langenhove & Harré 1999, 24 ff.). DM's memorandum thus only gives sporadic hints at the market discourse that is so dominant in IDA's and DJØF's position papers. It is mentioned that DM has the ambition *“to become the best negotiator of equal opportunities for professionals”*, but apart from this brief statement there is no sign of competitive or growth themes in the 35 page long memorandum.

Furthermore, there are some significant differences in the way in which the unions state and manifest their agency in the position papers. In the position paper (IDA 2005a) IDA very clearly constructs its identity by discursive and rhetorical means borrowed from a commercial and service-oriented discourse that stress ‘effectiveness’, ‘cost-consciousness’, ‘value-for-money’, ‘payoff’ and ‘benefit’ as values. IDA’s agency is thus constructed in terms of a service-providing enterprise with the purpose of supplying membership services in a competitive market. Likewise, DJØF’s position paper (DJØF 2010) draws on the commercial and service-oriented discourse when it argues that DJØF should develop a ‘top-tuned organization and service’ for the members. However, the paper also broadens the scope of ‘service’ by addressing the members’ long-term needs. It is the conviction of the paper that these needs can be addressed by political initiatives. The metaphor of ‘the customer’ is also prevalent in DJØF’s position paper when it is stated that DJØF should care for ‘membership satisfaction’ and ‘loyalty’ by providing ‘unique offers’ and ‘branding’ of DJØF. The difference between IDA’s and DJØF’s self-positioning is most clearly expressed by DJØF’s ambition to care for the members’ ‘long-term’ needs. Thus, the two unions construct their ‘members’ and ‘members’ needs’ in different ways. IDA constructs the ‘member’ as an economically calculating customer with an agency focused on ‘value-for-money’ and ‘return-on-investment’. DJØF’s construction of the ‘member’ differs slightly by stressing the customer’s long-term perspective. This entails that DJØF’s concept of ‘membership service’ includes political activities and ‘branding’ as components. These subjectifications of the ‘member’ and the ‘member’s needs’ contribute to the positioning of the unions. In contrast to IDA and DJØF, the self-positioning of DM uses other discursive resources. DM’s position paper and memorandum describe the political objectives and ambitions of the union, whereas the determination of ‘member’s needs’ and the subjectification of the ‘member’ are less well described. Instead the position paper and the memorandum make use of a relatively totalizing political discourse that makes mention of e.g. “the collective alternation of contract law”, “quality of work and democratic management”, “equal opportunities”, “collective and solidarity-based retirement reforms” – conceptual categories that derive their meaning from general social and societal conditions. The choice of vocabulary is of course motivated by the union’s ambition to present itself as an engaged organization that takes a stance in relation to social and societal issues. The construction of DM’s agency is thus directly linked to a general political framework.

The rationalities and technologies of the strategies

Our analysis has shown how the three professional unions draw upon different resources and discursive means in their efforts to position themselves. They make use of different storylines, genres, concepts, descriptions and rhetoric, but the position papers also install different authorities, moral codes, values, differentiations, divisions of labor, etc. that are stipulated and reproduced in the unions' discursive-material practices. In the governmentality tradition (Rose 1999; Dean 2010; Miller & Rose 2008) these orderings of the discursive formations are described as 'rationalities' or 'programs' that conduce practice. Rationalities are not inherent mentalities, homogeneous formations or metaphysical *zeitgeists*. Rather they should be considered as composite and contingent formations that form a relatively stable practice in specific historical and societal contexts. Another dimension of these practices is related to the technologies and instrumental grips that are used in order to act and act on behalf of others. Authorities use these technologies to construct, conduct and intervene on individual and collective actions. Thus the technologies prescribe ways to handle member 'dialogue' (e.g. surveys of member loyalty and satisfaction, membership representation systems, etc.).

As previously mentioned, the commercial and service-oriented discourse is predominant in the position papers of IDA and DJØF. This 'service rationality' construes the member as a calculating customer that can be recruited and retained by attractive offers that give 'value-for-money'. Likewise, this rationality construes the union's organizations as units of service production that can be optimized and made more effective in order to reduce the members' costs. This rationality is associated with technologies that are installed in order to manage the union's production machinery in the most efficient way. This can be done by using membership satisfaction surveys, recruitment units, segmentation of membership groups, branding, implementation of ICT based membership systems, optimization of the union's services through HRD, quality management, etc. As mentioned, this 'service rationality' is prevailing in the position papers of IDA and DJØF, but the rationality can also be traced in DM's memorandum. Through the use of technologies, like membership loyalty surveys, partnership analyses, focus groups, quality management tools, etc., the unions can optimize their 'performance' in accordance with the stipulated success criteria. The service rationality strips the union's strategies of explicit values. Instead the values are installed as implicit technologies of efficiency and performance measures.

Another mode of governance is found in what we will label the ‘political rationality’. It is characterized by its orientation towards interests and stances in relation to the regulation and governance of society and ‘the social’ (Rose 1999, Miller & Rose 2008, 84). As noted by Miller and Rose (2008, 86) ‘the social’ has become an a priori for the political rationality by stipulating a social totality governed by authoritative principles of rights, obligations, social protection, justice and solidarity. This rationality focuses on specifying the social order that commences individual and collective action. This rationality dominates the position paper and the derivative memorandum of DM. The documents state the union’s points of orientation through explicit political objectives and values, such as ‘freedom of speech’, ‘equal opportunities’, ‘academic freedom’, etc. The memorandum operationalizes these values in the proposed ‘political activities’ of the union that seeks to influence decision makers within the political system, negotiating system and other counterparts.

The picture, however, is not quite clear. Thus IDA’s position paper states that:

“IDA’s motto, STRENGTH THROUGH KNOWLEDGE, applies to the members and society in general. IDA will support the members and society – through professional measures, by labor market initiatives and on a political level.”

This disposition draws on a political vocabulary, but it is not substantiated in any sense throughout the position paper and it does not play a role in the overall storylines presented in the paper.

Likewise, the commercial and service-oriented strategy is traceable in DM’s papers – e.g. when there is mention of economic advantages of the membership and discounts that should function as recruitment incentives. However, these passages in the papers have an isolated and rudimentary status. DJØF’s position paper also includes elements from both rationalities. It is evident, however, that the general argument presented in the position paper is disinclined to making explicit mention of political values – instead the values are instrumentalized in the competitive discourse about efficiency.

Discussion

Our analysis shows that the strategies of the three unions are oriented by a political rationality and/or service rationality. Furthermore, it demonstrates that these rationalities are associated with

various technologies that are used to govern actions (e.g. the use of membership loyalty surveys, quality management, branding, etc.). But where does this discursive analysis leave us? We need to understand the unions' reflections about their visions and missions in relation to the general societal development and the development of new rationalities and technologies of governance. Our ambition is not to explain the presence of the unions' strategies or describe their geneses. Our intention is to reflect upon and discuss the conclusions of our analysis in relation to a general diagnosis of society. The development of strategies in the unions is not an isolated phenomenon. It must be considered in relation to general discursive tendencies and developments in society in general.

Many social scientists have observed and described the development of government mechanisms in the advanced liberal societies (e.g. Giddens 1994; Sennett 2006; Bauman 2000; Beck 2007). Our discussion, however, will take its point of departure in the diagnosis given by, amongst others, Peter Miller and Nicolas Rose (e.g. Miller & Rose 2008). Miller and Rose stress that the modes of governance have changed in the advanced liberal societies (Miller & Rose 2008, 84). It is a characteristic of these societies that the aims, mechanisms, limitations and even the object of governance must be understood as new practices of freedom and choice. It is a characteristic of the advanced liberal societies that governance is sought through other means and mechanisms than political enforcement and regulation – in order to set the citizens and social actors free and increase autonomy. Instead liberal governance works through actions and mechanisms that seek to model, shape and utilize the dispositions and actions of free agents. Governance thus works through 'free will' and 'the choice of the individual' (e.g. Rose 1989/99; Rose 1999). The genealogical investigations of Miller and Rose show how new forms of liberal governance have come to dominate the significant institutions and discursive fields of western societies (e.g. healthcare and education). Miller and Rose do not propose a general theory of society or impose totalizing models of societal transformation processes. Instead they describe and highlight significant tendencies and historical developments in the advanced liberal societies. In these societies governance has been dominated by 'the social'. 'The social' has become instrumentalized by political regulations of the market and the behavior of individuals in order to establish 'security' and 'social justice'. The governance of institutions in society has been based on the a priori premise that stability in society depends on a common solidarity – solidarity among citizens confined within the geographical borders of the nation state. However, the social territorialities of the nation states are challenged by

economic globalization and the increasing fragmentation of the social units. Cities, sectors, specialized markets, segments, subcultures, etc. are challenging the dominant role of the nation states as identity-guiding markers (Miller & Rose 2008; Rose 1999, chap. 5). In consequence, the governance of societal institutions has undergone a transformation. The governance 'from a social perspective' (i.e. a totalizing political perspective where the limits of society coincide with the territoriality of the nation state) is increasingly challenged by a perspective that installs new units of alignment and guidance. These units bring together hybrid 'a-moral' and economical rationalities and technologies with the 'micro-moral' rationalities of local communities. The communities can either be dispersed communities of interest, local communities of practice or other communities that reproduce social relations and moral codes as a basis for the regulation of individual and collective practice. Miller and Rose thus demonstrate how the 'crisis' of the welfare states coincides with transformations in the dominant modes of governance. They describe how the traditional totalizing 'social perspective' has been marginalized and substituted by new modes of governance inspired by neo-liberal principles and ideals of 'individualism' and 'freedom of choice' that combine 'a-moral' market-based incentives with the 'moral' perspectives and interests of (local) communities.

Our analysis shows that the strategy statements of the three unions reflect this general transformation of the modes of governance as described by Rose and Miller. The position papers of IDA, DJØF and DM are influenced by the rationalities of the service/market discourse and the political discourse. It is obvious, however, that DM's strategy statements most significantly argue from the perspective of the political rationality, whereas IDA's and DJØF's lines of arguments are inscribed in the rationality of the market and services. These discursive framings both enable and limit the strategy horizons of the unions and thus delimit the unions' scope of possible and meaningful actions. This can be made clear by relating our analysis to the societal diagnosis outlined by Miller and Rose. Miller and Rose document how the 'the social perspective' impairs political imagination and fantasy, as the advanced liberal societies are gradually differentiated and fragmented into territorial communities that are regulated by the principles of the market, structures of incentives and micro-social values and relations. But what are the implications of this development in relation to the unions' strategies?

Seen from a general historical perspective this development has made it more difficult for the unions to base their strategies on a general political cause. It has become still more difficult to

legitimize the old dream of the unions about achieving solidarity through the development of the welfare state. The unions thus refrain from making alliances to or even endorsing the general political agendas of the political parties. Although the professional unions in Denmark never have had intimate relations to political parties, they have had – and to a certain extent still have – ambitions about setting general political agendas. This ambition is still most outspoken in the position paper of DM. Although IDA has ambitions to influence the political agenda, the issues most often raised by the union relate to relatively narrow agendas about technology and industrial policy. The policies and activism of IDA are thus primarily related to issues of immediate concern for the community of engineers. In general the unions are inclined to regard political activism and lobbyism as ‘membership service’ and not in general as a contribution to a ‘social’ cause. In general the professional unions regard the ‘social’ as troublesome. Although it might happen that the professional unions take a stance in relation to redistribution policies and taxation, the unions have difficulties in establishing a consensus on these issues. Members of the professional unions often consider these issues strictly a matter for the political parties. This ‘de-totalizing’ of the unions’ activities manifests itself as a tendency to focus more on ‘empowerment’ technologies (career guidance, continuing education, professional courses, etc.) than general societal issues. The position papers of the three unions elaborate on these technologies in great detail.

Another notable characteristic of the unions’ position papers is their subjectification of the members. In the traditional ‘social perspective’ the members are subjectified in terms of ethical codes of rights and obligations (Miller & Rose 2008, 90). Although this discourse gives agency to the individual, this agency is always defined in relation to wider societal determinants (the social and economic conditions, position and background of the individual, etc.). This ethical code informs DM’s strategy, whereas the strategies of IDA and DJØF subjectify the members in quite another way. The construction of the member/subject in DJØF’s strategy only pays slight attention to the general societal framework (although DJØF explicitly states that the union wants to influence this framework!). Instead the construction lingers around the idea of the active and independent subject that is in control and the union as an assistive community that can provide services on demand. By positioning the member as an independent customer, the member is able to ‘empower’ his/her career by ‘drawing on the union’s services’. The union is described as a ‘meeting place’, a ‘community’ and a ‘resource pool’ – by investing your assets in the ‘pool’ you are able to profit and optimize your ‘livelihood’. DJØF’s position paper has no mention of ‘rights’ and ‘obligations’ in

relation to either working conditions or society in general. The engagement and aptitude of the subjects are conferred to the community of the union.

The general reconfigurations of the unions' discourses – from a totalizing social perspective to a de-totalizing community perspective – are manifest in the position papers of the unions. The conception of 'collectivism' and 'unity' are thus construed along the lines of the 'community'. On the other hand, the unions establish a mode of governance where members may *choose* to engage in the community and make use of the 'services' of the union in order to 'empower' their individual careers. However, our interpretation of DM's position paper and memorandum makes it clear that the discursive drift in no way is universal. But it is evident that the 'community perspective' plays a pivotal role in the professional unions' reflections on their *raison d'être*, whereas the traditional 'social perspective' is marginalized.

Conclusion and perspectives

Our reading of the unions' position papers demonstrates the predominance of the 'service' discourse as an overarching ideology or rationality in the unions' reflections of their *raison d'être*. But our reading also makes it clear that this rationality is far from unison. The dissonance is especially viable in DM's reflections, but it is also possible to trace elements informed by alternative rationalities in IDA's and DJØF's documents. The 'political' discourse with its societal perspectives is the most conspicuous in DM's position paper, but it is also evident that the community perspective plays a significant role in the position papers of all three unions. On reading the position papers we can thus conclude that the unions are struggling to stabilize their identities by positioning themselves in a field of tensions where the discourses of 'service' and 'the political' form marked points of orientation. Correspondingly, the 'community perspective' and the 'social perspective' can be seen to demarcate stances that implicitly inform the unions' strategies. Thus our discourse analysis has illuminated a range of available positions that the unions can inhabit. This range of possible positions is afforded and restrained by discourses that installs a 'service' rationality and/or a political rationality as a reservoir for arguments, storylines, legitimations, etc. By pointing to the preconditions and limitations of the strategy statements of the three professional unions, our discourse analysis has thus been critical and problematizing – in a Foucauldian sense (Foucault 1988). The analysis forms a platform for further inquiries and critically informed actions in relation to (re)defining the unions' agendas and activities.

The findings of our analysis motivated us to interview the presidents of respectively DM and IDA in order to deepen and advance our interpretation of the unions' roles, objectives and *raison d'être*.^{iv} The interviews revolved around the role of 'solidarity' and 'collectiveness' in present-day union practices in Denmark and how the unions reflexively define their positions in their strategies. Thus, the conversation touched upon questions like 'is present day unionism founded on solidarity and how is solidarity conceived in the unions for professionals?', 'who should be included/excluded in union solidarity?', 'what should be the overall objective of the unions?' and 'how should unions pursue their objectives?'. The interviews made it clear that the presidents of the two unions were aware of the different rationalities described in our analysis and they also recognized that these rationalities suggest different – and contesting – perspectives of unionism and union work. Both presidents were thus quite aware of the fact that the unions cannot be considered as homogenous entities and that there are many and different reasons for members to join and engage in union activities. They thus stressed the composite and dynamic role of unionism and pointed to formative historical events that had molded various interests and perspectives into present-day professional unions. These historical accounts and reconstructions given in the interviews were used as a basis for the presidents' further elaborations on the future of union practices in general and the strategic perspectives of IDA and DM in particular.

The position taken by the president of IDA regarding the future of unionism tended to emphasize the importance of the "what's-in-it-for-me" perspective:

"I don't think we'll be able to convince people to join our community (Danish: fællesskab) – or any other solidarism – unless they have a clear idea about what they can gain from joining. [...] What I want to say is that the members will not become members unless there is something in it for them..."

The president further elaborated on this perspective by stressing the hybrid character of the union's community:

"I think there will be an increasing recognition of the need to be part of many communities. [...] I think we will witness the birth of a community for professionals in Denmark. And I think there will

still be a need to have a community for engineers – that is, people with a degree in engineering or people with a special interest in engineering issues, or people with close work relations to engineers. But this community might very well exceed the borders of Denmark.”

Further on in the interview she continues this line of argument about joining communities:

“I think the traditional and historical trade union perspective will be a driver for many years to come. But if you are to think about the development of our society [IDA] and the development of communities, you need to envision yourself in the future. What is happening around us? How are workplaces changing? How is society changing? And how should we position ourselves as those we have become? What use can we make of the community? And this is where I believe...if I should express my personal opinion...we need to combine several communities. If you draw circles, there are small communities and big communities, and this [IDA] is the framework for the communities. But the communities can cross national borders – it can be virtual networks. It can be communities where people meet face to face. And then we can have communities that cover traditional trade union activities, and communities that have activities in other areas. But they are all...they all belong to our community.”

The line of arguments presented here does not see the future of IDA as a traditional trade union but rather as a conglomeration of diverse – and maybe overlapping – communities with varying fields of interests and objectives. In this construction there might not be a unique common point of reference or set of objectives for the unions’ activities – rather the union is conceived as a facilitative framework for diverse communities of professionals.

The president of DM recognizes the fact that members may choose to join a union for many – and diverse – reasons. But in regard to DM she points to the specific profile of the union:

“There are probably many reasons [for joining DM], but one has to do with belonging to a professional community. Sometimes I ask the newly graduated members what made them decide to join DM. Typically they give the same answers. We meet somebody who is like us – with the same kind of educational background and knowledge, and with the same general background. Now, DM covers a lot of educations, but we have a united understanding of the purpose of our educations.

And there are also very specific reasons. Something that has characterized our profile has been the struggle for equal opportunities. The young people find this very important. [...] And then of course there are still many who say: 'you have to join a union for reasons of solidarity'".

These excerpts from the interviews support the findings of our analysis, namely that the professional unions in Denmark outline their strategies by drawing on diverse rationalities with various emphases on the roles of 'service' and 'the political'. But although there are differences in the emphasis on the 'political' as a constituent element in union practices, there is a widespread agreement – as the excerpts show – that union practices are all about providing a 'community' for the members. The uniting characteristic is defined by their 'professionalism' and/or the fact that they are 'professionals'. Obviously, 'professional' and 'professionalism' are floating signifiers that leave room for interpretation. In the unions' strategies, 'professional' and 'professionalism' oscillate between signifying a special habitus of the members, a common educational background, common working conditions, common (professional) interests, shared political observations in relation to societal issues (of specific relevance to the profession), a common domain of practice and common conditions of life for the members. Thus, the territoriality of the unions and their missions are closely interwoven with special understandings of the 'professional' and 'professionalism'. Focusing on the ascription of 'professionalism' as a denominator for the unions' reflexive practices would thus outline an obvious continuation for our research agenda.

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ⁱ Kendall & Wickhams (1999) makes clear how discourse analytic perspectives are central in Science & Technology Studies, and Grant et al. (2009) explains the role of discourse analysis in Critical Management Studies. The Governmentality perspective (e.g. Dean 2010) draws heavily on Foucault's works.

ⁱⁱ The interaction between the union members and their administrative officials and advisors is an interesting issue. We will, however, refrain from elaborating on this dimension any further.

ⁱⁱⁱ It is not all trade unions that use the word 'strategy' as a label for their considerations about visions, goals, etc. Predominantly, the term 'strategy' is used by companies and private enterprises. Some trade unions are more reluctant to label their considerations about visions, missions and goals as 'position papers' (Danish: 'principprogrammer'). Thus

the trade unions are making a discursive statement in their preference to use either ‘strategy’ or ‘position paper’ as a label.

^{iv} We invited the presidents from respectively IDA, DJØF and DM for individual interviews. We had stated our research interests in an e-mail invitation and announced that we would like to have their opinions on the dispositions of the professional unions in relation to ‘solidarity’ and ‘collectiveness’. We got immediate and positive feedback on our request from Ingrid Stage (president of DM) and Frida Frost (president of IDA). The president of DJØF was also positive but practical circumstances stood in the way for his participation. The two interviews were performed in the unions’ domiciles in March and April 2011 and lasted 1-1½ hours. The interview method was semi-structured and our intent was to inquire further about the unions’ perspectives on their *raison d’être*. Both interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed.